

Background

At the March 2009 Board meeting, staff reported to the Board that a group of Regional partners had begun meeting to discuss efforts to organize businesses, community organizations, government agencies and other partners to discuss a Sierra-wide initiative. The effort to that point had identified goals related to protecting and restoring the natural resources of the Sierra Nevada Region, transforming and diversifying the economic prospects for the Region, and strengthening the social fabric of small, rural communities throughout the Sierra. This would be accomplished, in part, by aligning the efforts of participating entities to attract more investment to the Region and working collaboratively to identify and support projects. This effort was initially referred to as the Sierra Nevada Environmental and Economic Improvement Initiative (SNEEII).

Current Status

Over the past few months, staff has continued to discuss the concept behind SNEEII, including meetings with our federal partners. A number of activities have been occurring that are consistent with the goals identified in SNEEII, although progress to develop a specific initiative has been slow.

Based on these discussions and further consideration by staff, we determined that a more focused effort would be appropriate and most likely to achieve success. Specifically, SNC staff had decided to focus time and expertise to support community-based collaborative efforts to address forest/community health issues by facilitating “on-the-ground” projects throughout the Sierra. This initiative will convene a diversity of interests including experts, project proponents, environmental organizations, industry representatives, community members and other interested parties in targeted locations. The focus of these projects will be to protect the watersheds/forests/ecosystems of the Sierra from catastrophic wildfire while using the biomass (fire fuels) removed to create clean green jobs and sustainable economic development.

On October 29th the SNC held a “webposium” across nine locations in the Region focused on this subject matter. Over 110 participants attended the webposium, titled Connecting the Dots, Wildfire, Forest Health and Sustainable Rural Economies. The event brought together the wide range of stakeholders, policy-makers and researchers described above to discuss ways in which sustainable economic and environmental outcomes can be achieved. Participants met in the various locations following the three panel sessions to discuss local needs and opportunities.

The SNC will be following up on the various ideas and proposed next steps. This may include providing these collaborative efforts needed resources to succeed in developing a common vision and trust among groups that historically have had conflict around forest management issues. The type of assistance will depend on the local issues and the group’s needs, as defined by the local participants.

Next Steps

SNC staff will continue to identify opportunities to assist with local efforts and development of a broader regional initiative. A “Sustainable Sierra” regional initiative would provide an opportunity for additional strategic investment and, if appropriate, identification of key policy changes needed.

Recommendation

No action is needed by the Board at this time; however comments and direction are welcome.